

NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-6072
CHRIS KERN

AUGUST 10, 1978

RECALLING A MAYOR IN CLEVELAND?

ANNCR:

THIS SUNDAY, VOTERS IN THE AMERICAN CITY OF CLEVELAND, OHIO, WILL DECIDE WHETHER TO REMOVE THEIR MAYOR AFTER ONLY SEVEN MONTHS IN OFFICE. THE RECALL ELECTION IN CLEVELAND HAS BEEN RECEIVING NATIONAL ATTENTION HERE IN THE UNITED STATES, AND CHRIS KERN HAS A BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

HIS CRITICS CALL HIM "DENIS THE MENACE," AFTER THE NAME OF A POPULAR CARTOON CHARACTER. AND THAT'S ABOUT THE NICEST THING THEY CALL HIM.

CLEVELAND MAYOR DENNIS KUCINICH -- WHO IS OF IRISH-CROATIAN PARENTAGE -- IS MORE TYPICALLY DESCRIBED BY THOSE WHO WANT TO REMOVE HIM FROM OFFICE AS "DEMENTED" -- A "POLITICAL PROSTITUTE" WHO GOVERNS BY "THREATS, INTIMIDATION AND INDICTIVE ACTIONS. MAYOR KUCINICH RESPONDS BY CHARGING THAT HIS OPPONENTS ARE "EITHER STUPID OR CROOKED, OR MAYBE BOTH." IN ONE WIDELY-QUOTED SPEECH, HE DESCRIBED THE MEMBERS OF CLEVELAND'S CITY COUNCIL -- THE LOCAL LEGISLATIVE BODY -- AS "LUNATICS," "BUFFOONS," "FAKERS" AND "LIARS." THE RECALL ELECTION THAT IS TAKING PLACE THIS SUNDAY IN CLEVELAND MAY NOT BE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL EVENT IN THE UNITED STATES THIS YEAR, BUT IT MAY WELL BE THE MOST COLORFUL.

THE REAL ISSUE IS THE PERSONALITY OF MR. KUCINICH, WHO WAS ELECTED MAYOR OF CLEVELAND SEVEN MONTHS AGO. SINCE HIS ELECTION, HE HAS OFFENDED MEMBERS OF ALMOST EVERY IDENTIFIABLE INTEREST GROUP. BUT AT THE SAME TIME, HIS UNREMITTING WAR AGAINST THE CITY'S POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT HAS PROVIDED HIM

WITH A HARD CORE OF SUPPORT, AS WELL AS THE FORMIDABLE ARRAY OF OPPONENTS WHO DEMAND HIS OUSTER.

CLEVELAND IS A HEAVILY INDUSTRIALIZED CITY IN THE CENTRAL "MIDWEST" REGION OF THE UNITED STATES. IT HAS HAD MORE THAN ITS SHARE OF THE RACIAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS THAT AFFLICT MANY OF THIS COUNTRY'S OLDER URBAN AREAS. WHEN MAYOR KUCINICH WAS ELECTED LAST NOVEMBER, IT WAS WITH THE SUPPORT OF A BROAD BASE OF WORKING-CLASS, WHITE VOTERS FROM RECENT-IMMIGRANT FAMILIES, MOSTLY OF EASTERN EUROPEAN DESCENT. HIS PROMISES OF REFORM WERE EFFECTIVE ENOUGH TO APPEAL TO THESE NORMALLY CONSERVATIVE VOTERS. BUT AFTER SEEING HIM IN ACTION, MANY OF THEM APPEAR TO HAVE TURNED AGAINST HIM.

HIS CRITICS COMPLAIN OF HIS INTEMPERATE POLITICAL STYLE AND HIS HABIT OF APPOINTING INEXPERIENCED CAMPAIGN WORKERS -- MANY OF THEM IN THEIR 20'S -- TO TOP JOBS IN THE CITY GOVERNMENT. MR. KUCINICH HIMSELF IS ONLY 31 YEARS OLD, AND HE LOOKS EVEN YOUNGER. BUT THE OPPOSITION AGAINST HIM DIDN'T CRYSTALLIZE UNTIL HE FIRED ONE OF HIS FEW POPULAR APPOINTEES -- AN EXPERIENCED, LIBERAL POLICE CHIEF IMPORTED FROM SAN FRANCISCO WHO HAD WON THE RESPECT OF LEADERS IN BOTH BLACK AND WHITE NEIGHBORHOODS.

WHILE LEADERS OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CITY'S BUSINESS INTERESTS HAVE PROVIDED THE MOST VISIBLE ORGANIZED EFFORTS TO RECALL MAYOR KUCINICH, HIS SUPPORT SEEMS TO HAVE DROPPED DRAMATICALLY IN THE ETHNIC NEIGHBORHOODS THAT ELECTED HIM. MORE THAN HALF THE SIGNATURES ON THE PETITIONS THAT LED TO THE RECALL ELECTION CAME FROM SUCH NEIGHBORHOODS. HIS CHANCES FOR POLITICAL SURVIVAL DEPEND ON THE EXTEND TO WHICH HE CAN RALLY THE SUPPORT HE ONCE HAD IN THESE WHITE,

WORKING-CLASS AREAS -- AND, AT THIS POINT, IT APPEARS QUITE POSSIBLE THAT THIS UNUSUAL EFFORT TO REMOVE AN ELECTED OFFICIAL FOR PURELY POLITICAL REASONS MAY WELL SUCCEED.

-0-

WJL/PY